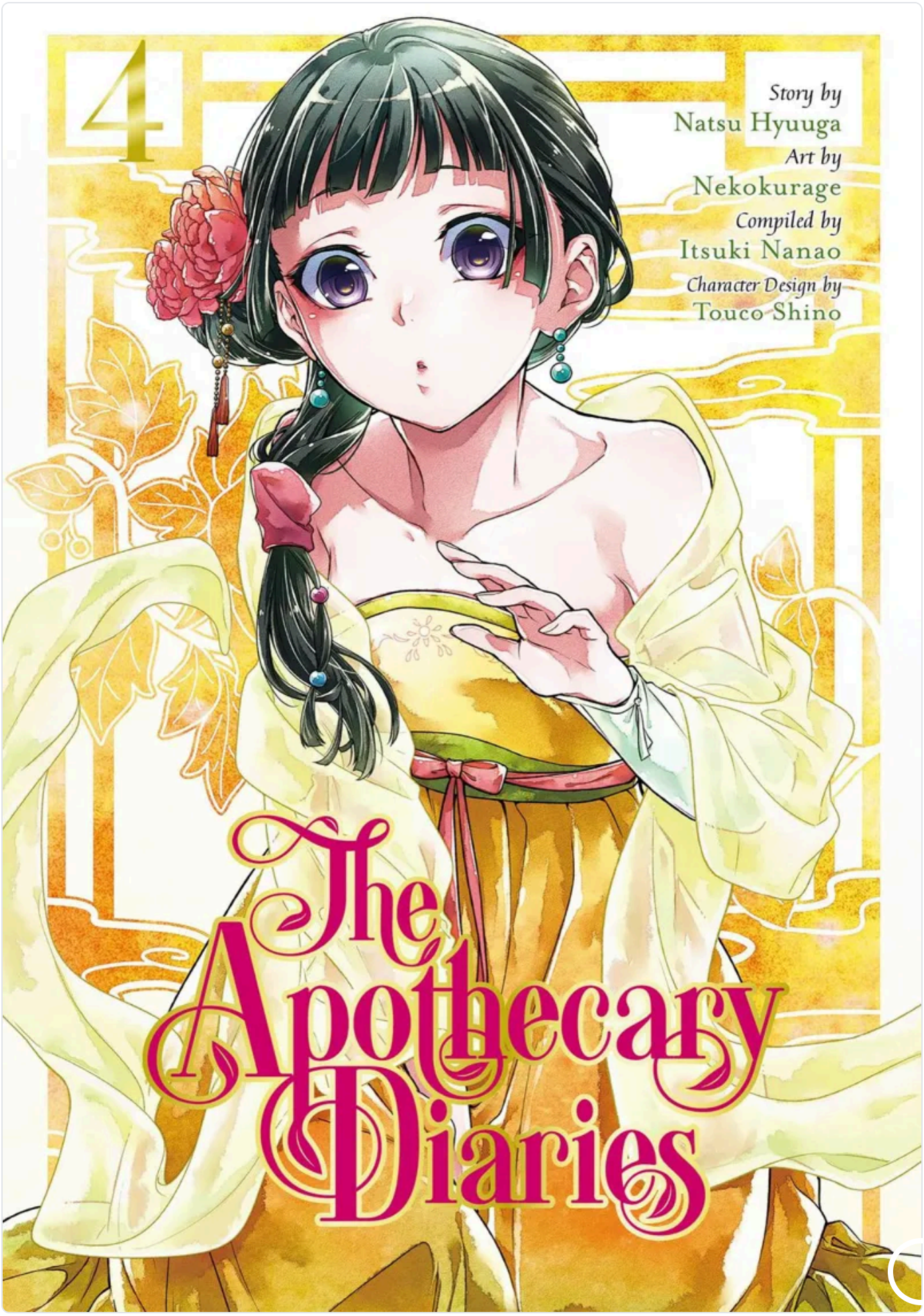
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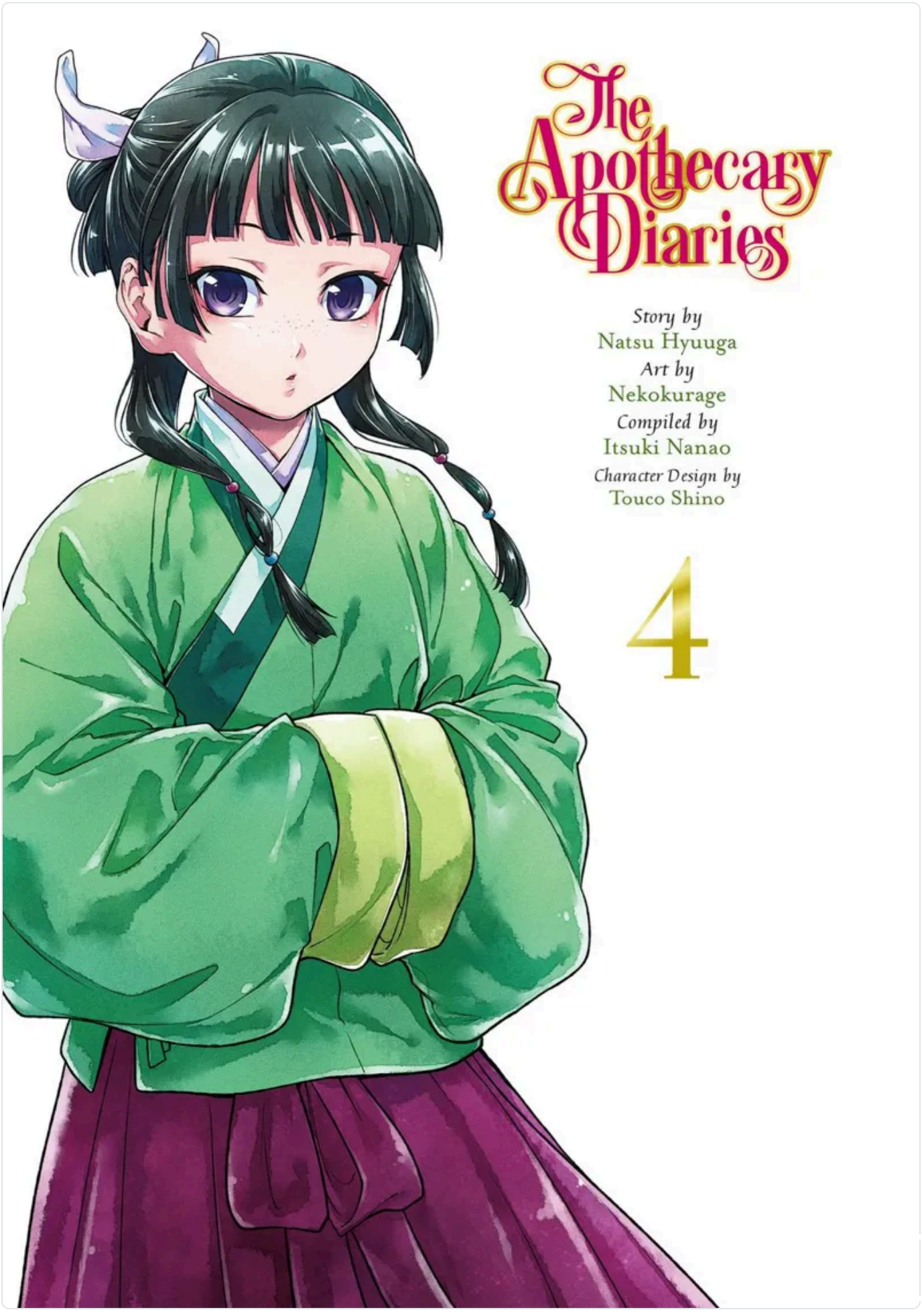
The Apothecary Diaries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The Apothecary Diaries

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SIR JINSHI.
WE'VE FINALLY RECEIVED THE REPORT CONCERNING THE INCIDENT AT THE GARDEN BANQUET.
IT'S BEEN OVER TWO MONTHS SINCE.
I'D SAY IT'S LONG OVER-DUE.
MY MOST HUMBLE APOLO-GIES.
SO? WHO IN BLAZES WAS BEHIND IT?
YES, SIR.
IT WAS FENGMING OF THE GARNET PALACE.
CONSORT ADUO'S HEAD LADY-IN-WAITING.

Chapter 15: A Request for Maomao

CROWD
わっ
CROWD
わっ
WE'RE LUCKY IT'S WINTER.
SHE'S IN SHOCKINGLY GOOD SHAPE FOR A DROWNED CORPSE.
GLANCE
チラ…
PLEASE COME WITH MEEEE!
HE BEGGED, SO I CAME TO HAVE A LOOK, BUT...
WORD IS, SHE WAS FOUND THIS MORNING, FLOATING IN THE MOAT OUTSIDE.
GOING BY HER CLOTHING, SHE MUST HAVE BEEN A LADY SERVING IN THE INNER COURT.

AFRAID NOT.
HUH?!
YOUNG MISS!
PERCHANCE YOU COULD HANDLE THE EXAMINATION DUTIES FOR ME?
TREMBLE
QUAKE
...WHAT A TRAVESTY THAT EXAMINING THE BODY SHOULD BE LEFT TO THIS QUACK.
MURMUR
I'VE BEEN WARNED OFF TOUCHING THE DEAD.
REALLY, NOW? HOW VERY CURIOUS.
EEEE!
AHHH!
NOT THAT THERE'S ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT HAVING A CORPSE IN FRONT OF YOU.
GOOD DAY, SIR JINSHI.

REACH
.....AS YOU WISH.
URGH!
NOW, THEN, DOC-TOR.
MAY I ASK YOU TO CONDUCT A THOROUGH EXAM OF THE BODY?
AT A GLANCE, THE COURTESANS MAY APPEAR CAGED AND DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM...
...BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU COULD SAY THEY'RE BEING KEPT SAFE...
...FROM THE DANGERS THAT LURK OUTSIDE.
I'M USED TO SEEING THIS SORT OF THING.
THE BACK-STREETS OF THE PLEASURE DISTRICT ARE A LAWLESS PLACE.
YOU DON'T SEEM UPSET BY THE SIGHT OF HER.
8

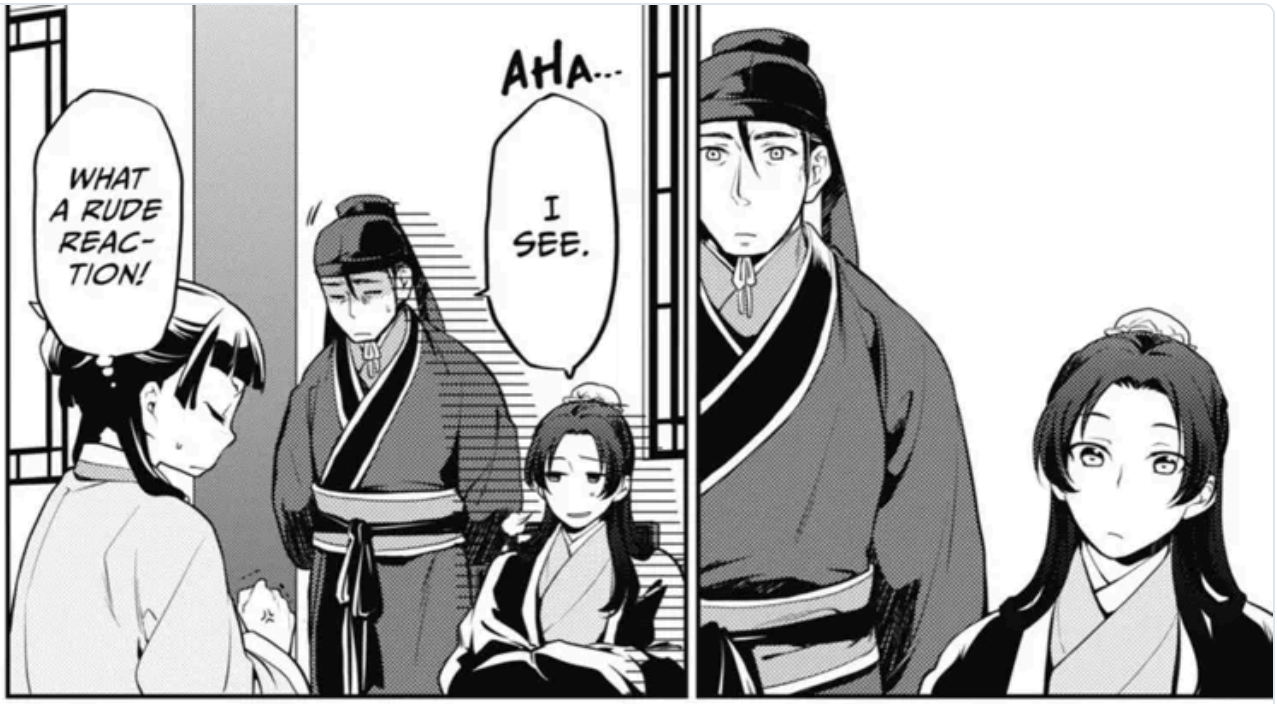
THE DECEASED IS A TALL WOMAN.
SHE HAS A HARD, WOODEN SHOE ON ONE FOOT AND JUST A BANDAGE ON THE OTHER.
HER FINGER-TIPS ARE BRIGHT RED.
IT MUST'VE BEEN REALLY COLD IN THAT WATER.
I'D LIKE TO HEAR YOUR OPINION ONCE YOU'RE DONE HERE.
I'LL BE WAITING IN THE GUARD-ROOM OF THE CENTRAL GATE.
ALL RIGHT.

THE GIRL WAS A KITCHEN MAID.
UP UNTIL YESTERDAY, SHE WAS WORKING AS USUAL.
THE GUARDS BELIEVE SHE CLIMBED THE WALL LAST NIGHT AND THREW HERSELF INTO THE MOAT.
IN OTHER WORDS, SUICIDE. SHE MEANT TO LEAP TO HER DEATH.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
...WHAT I CAN SAY IS THAT SHE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT ALONE.
WHILE I CANNOT CONFIRM AS MUCH ...
THE WALLS SURROUNDING THE INNER COURT ARE FOUR TIMES TALLER THAN I AM.
WE HAVEN'T ANY TOOLS FOR SCALING THEM.
10

AFTER THE WHOLE AFFAIR WITH THE "GHOST" ...
...I CONTINUED TO WONDER HOW LADY FUYO MANAGED TO CLIMB ATOP THE WALLS...
...SO I WALKED AROUND, TAKING GREAT CARE TO INSPECT THEM.
HOW COULD ONE DO IT?
THEORETICALLY, IT IS POSSIBLE TO CLIMB THEM BARE-HANDED...
...BUT I DON'T BELIEVE A MAID LIKE HER WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MANAGE IT.
THAT'S WHEN...
!
...I DISCOVERED PROTRUSIONS ALONG THE WALL THAT I CAN ONLY ASSUME WERE USED BY ITS BUILDERS.
I BELIEVE LADY FUYO, A SKILLED DANCER...
BUT SURELY SUCH A FEAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR MOST WOMEN...
...TO SAY NOTH-ING OF...
...USED THOSE TO CLIMB UP THE WALL.
11

...A WOMAN WITH BOUND FEET, LIKE THAT MAID.
FOOT-BINDING IS A CUSTOM PRACTICED IN THE BELIEF THAT THE SMALLER THE FOOT, THE GREATER ITS BEAUTY.
A WOMAN'S FEET ARE BROKEN, THEN BOUND TIGHTLY WITH CLOTH, AND ENCASED IN WOODEN SHOES.
IT ISN'T DONE TO ALL WOMEN...
...BUT IN THE INNER COURT, I CATCH ITS TELLING GAIT EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE.
SO YOU BELIEVE THIS WAS MURDER, THEN?
BUT ... THAT, I CANNOT SAY FOR SURE.
...I'M CERTAIN SHE WENT INTO THE MOAT ALIVE.
12

HER FINGER-TIPS WERE BLOODIED AND RAW.
...TRYING TO GAIN PURCHASE AND CLIMB BACK OUT.
SHE MUST'VE CLAWED AT THE WALL OVER AND OVER...
BUT WHY?
THE MAN WHO TAUGHT ME INSTRUCTED ME TO NEVER TOUCH THE DEAD.
COULDN'T YOU TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT HER?
ONE TOUCH OF A CORPSE, AND YOU'LL BE OFF ROBBING GRAVES NEXT!
I KNOW JUST HOW CURIOUS YOU ARE!
JOLI ガシ
THAT'S WHY MY TEACHER WAS ADAMANT I STAY AWAY FROM THEM.
THOUGH CURIOUS SHE MAY BE, SHE DOES HAVE ENOUGH GOOD SENSE TO NOT GO AROUND ROBBING GRAVES.
THAT SAID, SHE STILL FEELS SHE OUGHT TO DO AS SHE WAS TOLD.
ER, WELL ...
...HUMAN BODIES TOO CAN BE USED IN MEDI-CINES.


AHA...
I SEE.
WHAT A RUDE REAC-TION!

ANYWAY ...

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF...
...I'D NEVER EVEN THINK OF TRYING TO TAKE MY OWN LIFE.
NOR WOULD I WANT TO DIE AT SOME-ONE ELSE'S HAND.
CAN'T TEST NEW MEDICINES AND POISONS WHEN YOU'RE DEAD.

WHAT ARE WE REALLY LOOKING AT HERE? SUICIDE OR MURDER?

...I'D DECIDED TO DIE...
BUT IF...
I WAS THINKING ABOUT WHICH POISON I'D LIKE TO DIE BY, IF I HAD TO.
WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
OH.
...NO ONE KNOWS WHEN THEIR TIME WILL BE UP.
BUT...
HARDLY.
DO YOU WANT TO DIE?

SIR JINSHI.
WHAT IS IT?
SHOULD THE NEED FOR MY EXECUTION EVER ARISE...
...WHY WOULD IT COME TO THAT?
...COULD YOU SEE THAT IT'S DONE BY POISON?
IF I COMMIT A BLUNDER WORTHY OF SUCH PUNISH-MENT...
...I ASSUME YOU WOULD BE THE ONE TO PASS JUDGMENT.

I AM BUT A PEAS-ANT.
A SIMPLE ERROR ON MY PART CAN ALL TOO EASILY SPELL THE END OF MY LIFE.
NO PEASANT MAY OPPOSE A NOBLE.
THE COUNTRY NOW MAY BE RULED WELL ENOUGH...
...BUT THAT MUCH HASN'T CHANGED.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME. I LET MYSELF GET CARRIED AWAY.
ペコッ BOW
EVEN IF I'M ORDERED TO DIE BY HANGING OR BEHEADING, I SHAN'T COMPLAIN.
BUT WHY IN HEAVEN'S NAME WOULD IT COME TO THAT?!

I WOULD NEVER DO SUCH A THING.
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF WHAT YOU WILL OR WON'T DO...
...BUT RATHER OF WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT DO.
LOOKS LIKE I'VE SAID SOMETHING HE FINDS TROUBLING.
THEN, IF YOU HAVE NO FURTHER NEED OF ME...
...I'LL BE ON MY WAY.

SO THEY DECIDED TO TREAT WHAT HAPPENED THE OTHER DAY AS A SUICIDE, HUH?
I HEARD IT WAS A SUICIDE.
OOOH, THAT!
JUST BETWEEN US...
キョロ LOOK
キョロ LOOK
THE LADY WHO DIED WAS A MAID AT THE GARNET PALACE, OKAY?
WHISPER
こそっ
...YOU DON'T SAY?
HFF!
HFF!
THE GARDEN BANQUET AGAIN? ISN'T THAT REALLY OLD NEWS?
WELL, EVERYONE'S SAYING SHE WAS THE ONE WHO TRIED TO POISON CONSORT LISHU AT THE GARDEN BANQUET!
19

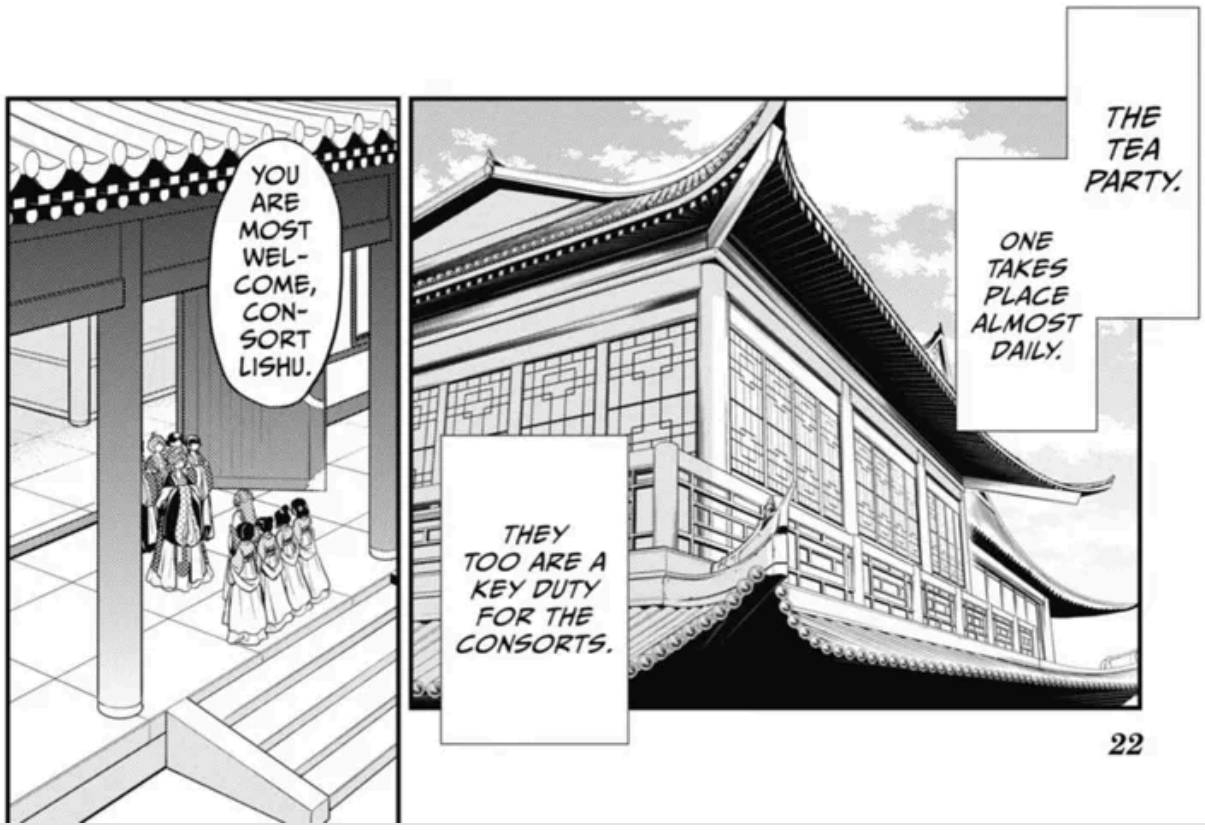
...IN AN ATTEMPT TO LOOK OUT FOR HER MISTRESS, YOU KNOW?
MAYBE CONSORT ADUO'S MAID POISONED CONSORT LISHU...
...TO MAKE WAY FOR A NEW AND YOUNGER HIGH-RANKING CONSORT.
THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF TALK FOR SOME TIME NOW ABOUT CONSORT ADUO'S RANK BEING LOWERED...

...14-YEAR-OLD CONSORT LISHU, 19-YEAR-OLD CONSORT GYOKUYO, 23-YEAR-OLD CONSORT LIHUA...
FROM YOUNGEST TO OLDEST, THE FOUR PRINCIPAL CONSORTS CURRENTLY RESIDING IN THE INNER COURT ARE...
AND...
...AND THE PURE CONSORT, LADY ADUO OF THE GARNET PALACE, WHO IS 35 YEARS OLD.
...THE SON SHE BORE THE CURRENT EMPEROR BEFORE HE ASCENDED TO THE THRONE...
...DIED IN INFANCY.
SHE IS ONE YEAR OLDER THAN THE EMPEROR AND HAS BEEN HIS CONSORT FROM THE TIME HE WAS THE CROWN PRINCE.

MOTHER TO A LOST SON...
...AN INSTITUTION DESIGNED FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF ENSURING THE EMPEROR FATHERS AS MANY HEIRS AS POSSIBLE, IT IS INEVITABLE FOR OLDER CONSORTS TO BE DEMOTED AND FORCED OUT.
IT'S MORE THAN LIKELY CONSORT ADUO IS YET CAPABLE OF BEARING CHILDREN, BUT HERE IN THE INNER COURT...
SHOULD CONSORT LIHUA FAIL TO BEAR ANOTHER HEIR...
...SHE TOO WILL PROBABLY SUFFER THE SAME FATE.
ADDING YOUNGER CONCUBINES IS ONLY NATURAL.
EVEN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS EVENTUALLY WITHER.
IF A FLOWER OF THE INNER COURT DOESN'T BEAR FRUIT, SHE ISN'T FIT FOR PURPOSE.

CONSORT GYOKUYO IS HAVING CONSORT LISHU OVER FOR TEA TOMORROW, ISN'T SHE?!
OH! THAT'S RIGHT!
WELL, IT'S REALLY RARE FOR TWO HIGH-RANKING CONSORTS TO HAVE A TEA PARTY LIKE THAT!
YOU'RE SURE IN THE KNOW.

YEAH, YEAH.
LEMME KNOW IF ANYTHING JUICY HAPPENS, OKAY?


YOU ARE MOST WEL-COME, CON-SORT LISHU.
THE TEA PARTY.
ONE TAKES PLACE ALMOST DAILY.
THEY TOO ARE A KEY DUTY FOR THE CONSORTS.

...THEY ARE A WAY FOR THE LADIES TO FEEL OUT EACH OTHER'S TRUE INTEN-TIONS.
...ALL RIGHT.
TO BE BLUNT...
MY THANKS FOR YOUR KIND INVITA-TION.
IT'S COLD TODAY, SO LET'S HEAD INSIDE.
CONSORT GYOKUYO HAILS FROM A TRADING OUTPOST IN THE WEST.
IT'S VITAL FOR HER TO STAY ABREAST OF CURRENT TRENDS AND INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE.
WATCHING CONSORT GYOKUYO TEASE OUT INFORMATION AMID THE GENIAL CHATTER IS REALLY SOME-THING.
SHE MAY APPEAR GENTLE, BUT SHE'S WORTHY OF HER TITLE.
SHE WRITES DOWN ALL THE INFOR-MATION SHE ACQUIRES FROM EACH PARTY IN A LETTER...
...AND REGULARLY SENDS THE NEWS HOME TO HELP OUT HER FAMILY.

I SUPPOSE IT IS THE NATURE OF WOMEN TO BE ON GUARD AROUND OTHER WOMEN.
TENSE ピリ
TENSE ピリ
TO BE HONEST, WE'RE NEVER EVEN THIS ATTENTIVE WHEN THE EMPEROR COMES CALLING.
THEY EVEN MADE ME LOSE THE FRECK-LES.
FLINCH ビク…
IF THE FOOD TASTER FROM THE BANQUET IS HERE...
...HER PUNISHMENT CAN'T HAVE BEEN TOO HARSH, SO I HAVE NOTHING TO FEEL BAD ABOUT.

LOOK キョロ
LOOK キョロ
I INFORMED GAO SHUN BEFORE ABOUT CONSORT LISHU BEING BULLIED BY HER LADIES.
IT'S NOT LIKE I BITE OR ANYTHING.
TREMBLE ぶるる
DEPRESSED しゅん…
ぶるる TREMBLE
THEY'RE FAR TOO KEEN ON THE FURNISHINGS OF THE JADE PALACE…
…AND CAN'T EVEN SPARE A GLANCE FOR THEIR MISTRESS…
…BUT THEY DON'T SEEM TO BE BULLYING HER EITHER.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT WITH SWEET FOODS?
MAYBE I WAS MISTAKEN?
IT WOULD BE BEST IF ALL'S WELL AND NOTHING'S GOING ON.
KLINK コト…

SINCE IT'S SO COLD AGAIN TODAY, I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT HIT THE SPOT.
SPLEN-DID!
ぱあ GLOW
OH YES! I LOVE SWEETS!
I'VE FOUND IT TO BE JUST THE THING LATELY.
THAT'S LIKE WHAT I MADE FOR THE GARDEN BANQUET.
IT REALLY WARMS YOU RIGHT UP!
HONEY BOILED WITH CITRUS PEEL.
OH?
ちらっ GLANCE
I DO HOPE YOU'LL ENJOY IT TOO!

CAN SHE NOT EAT HONEY EITHER?
WHISPER
INDEED!
I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE WON'T EVEN EAT THE HONEY SHE'S BEING OFFERED.
WHISPER
WHISPER
SHE'S BEING PICKY AGAIN.
GRR!
?
SLURP
A WORD IF I MAY, MY LADY?
OH MY, MY!

AILAN, I'M SORRY FOR THE TROUBLE.
I...
...THINK THIS NEEDS TO STEW A BIT LONGER.
YES, MY LADY ...?
WE'LL GET SOME-THING ELSE!
WOULD YOU BE ALL RIGHT WITH GINGER TEA?

UGH...
HMPH!
YES, THAT'S FINE, THANK YOU.
PHEW!

I HATE TO SAY IT...
...BUT I THINK MY REPORT TO GAO SHUN...
...WAS ACCURATE AFTER ALL.
HOW WENT THE TEA PARTY WITH CONSORT GYOKUYO AND CONSORT LISHU?
I KNEW SOMETHING FELT OFF ABOUT THIS...

SSK
スッ
I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT.
THEY APPEARED TO ENJOY THEMSELVES GREATLY.
SO THE TEA PARTY WAS HIS DOING, HMM?
MAY I HUMBLY ASK THAT YOU UNHAND ME?
GRIP
I'M NOT DONE WITH YOU YET.
I'VE HEARD THE RUMOR, YES.
...WAS THE MAID WHO KILLED HERSELF?
HAVE YOU HAD WORD THE WOULD-BE POISONER FROM THE GARDEN BANQUET ...

DO YOU TRULY BELIEVE SHE TOOK HER OWN LIFE?
BUT WHAT WOULD DRIVE A MERE MAID...
...TO POISON THE DISH OF A CON-SORT?
THAT IS NOT FOR ME TO DETERMINE.
I CANNOT SAY.

WOULD YOU DO ME A FAVOR...
...AND GO TO THE GARNET PALACE TO HELP OUT STARTING TOMORROW?
HE MAY PUT IT TO ME AS A QUESTION...
...BUT IT'S NOT AS IF I HAVE A CHOICE.
AS YOU WISH.